

# Prints of Peace



## Pastor's Letter:

*This month's Pastor's Letter was not written by me. It was submitted for the newsletter by Jackie Horn, on behalf of the "POP's Treasures" team. I thought it was an outstanding description of what POP's Treasures has accomplished in less than a year. We are truly doing outreach in many ways through this important ministry. Please read on... --Pastor Michael J. Scholtes*

### What is outreach?

POP's Treasures began with the concept of helping others from the sale of items that were donated. Helping others in need and providing a place for individuals to divest their items, all while offering these treasures at a modest price point. We have found that this little store has also provided us with so much more.

### Again, what is outreach?

I looked it up and the quick answer is "an effort to bring services and information to people where they live or spend time." At the end of 2023, we accomplished this with the money we had raised throughout the year. We continue to provide meals to Safe Harbor; we donated money to the Portland Upper Mt Bethel Food Pantry; through ELCA World Hunger Good Gifts, we sent farm animals to needy families; and we provided monetary support for local youth and rescued animals. We also spread the word on social media of these worthwhile programs.

In February we held our first giveaway day of clothing and household items, which was a success. We have given away a stroller, clothes, and toys to foster families, along with many pieces of luggage for a shelter for children in Bethlehem. We are overjoyed! This is real outreach!

**But there is more outreach that we never planned or expected...**we continue to hear comments from community members about what a wonderful thing we are doing. People are happy that we are helping others, even while it is done with their help. (Perhaps some aren't even aware that it's happening all because of their support.) The other day a woman said, "I'll be back for your soup this month, and I loved hearing about the farm animals." She was talking in March about a Facebook post we made in January! "It's a good thing happening here," says another woman. This is also outreach! Our stories are staying with people. Outreach is having a community hear what you are doing. Outreach is having a community want to participate in the program. Outreach is having a community that is inspired by what we are providing back to them, a beautifully displayed store where they can shop, which meets a price point where people, no matter their economic background, can take a treasure home.

**What is outreach?** It is a fulfilling venture, where we can build relationships with one another. Where what we are doing makes a difference. We didn't know that so much of this "outreaching" would be coming back to us. Now that is a full circle definition!

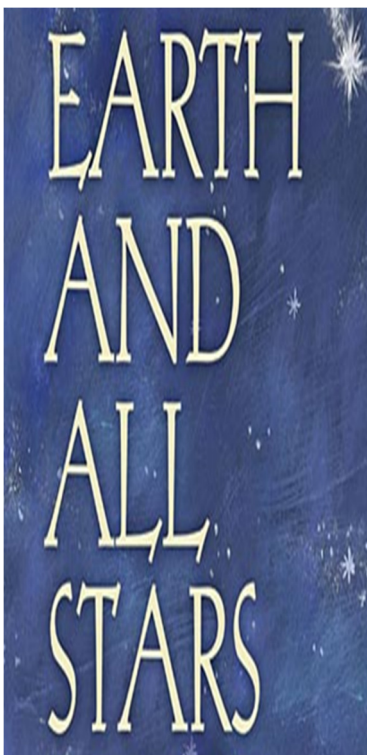


**“You Have Heard it Said”  
Stewardship Campaign Results**



We have surpassed the goal of \$10,000.00! 66 members of the congregation have committed **\$11,063.00!** This amount is made up by 31 commitments reflecting increases and 13 commitments indicated keeping their offering at the same level. **THANK YOU** to everyone who returned their intentions to keep supporting our ministries. Please look at “The Narrative of Support” published for the Annual Meeting in November. You have received a copy, but if you need another one, they are on the counter in the narthex. It reminds us of who we are as Prince of Peace and the ministry God has given us to do for the sake of HIS world.

*The Joyful Noise donations total \$82.00 for February.  
Do you know who we will be sharing with in 2024?*



**You are invited... Earth and All Stars Concert:**

Trinity Lutheran Church in Bangor, PA is pleased to invite you to Earth and All Stars on April 21st at 5 p.m. The church is located at 404 Broadway Bangor, PA 18013. The festival is lead by organist, composer, and conductor Mr. Alex Wilson.

Mr. Wilson currently serves as Associate Director of Music and Organist at Mount Pleasant Presbyterian Church in Mount Pleasant, SC. Mr. Wilson looks forward to leading the congregation and choir in song!

Would you like to be part of the choir? There is a choir present at the festival, so that means all your beautiful voices are needed! **Rehearsals are as follows:** April 19th: 6-8:30 p.m., April 20th: 10 am-1:30 p.m., April 21st: 3-4:30 p.m.

There will be breaks taken during each rehearsal so don't panic! This is a short-term commitment so just show up to rehearsals and sing! If you are interested in singing in the choir please contact Trinity Lutheran's Director of Music, Mr. Jeffrey Raub at (484)-541-8322 or email [allcreationsings1@outlook.com](mailto:allcreationsings1@outlook.com). Please respond with your voice part and what church you are coming from so we can recognize your congregation in the program. If Mr. Raub does not pick up the phone, please leave a message.

There will be a reception after the festival has finished!

# Thank You

Many thanks to all who donated, volunteered, and gave of their time with our 1st clothing and houseware giveaway. To say this event was a success is an understatement! After the doors opened, within the first 15 minutes we had 100 people picking out their treasures. Over 200 in attendance helped to really clean out the items we had to give away. The community donated items, clothing left over from our last rummage sale, and a lot of items from the boutique helped fill the tables for this wonderful outreach. Maybe we will do another one in August, which will give us time to save up and rest up!

POP's Treasures made a post on Facebook to collect luggage for a children's shelter in Bethlehem. The children come to the shelter with their belongings in a plastic bag. By providing luggage to these children, they are able to put their treasured belongings in luggage when they leave. By putting the word out, we collected a car full of luggage where many were stuffed inside of one another. After the car left, we collected more luggage for another delivery. We also have set aside children's toys for those in the foster care system. The many gifts we have received have allowed us to touch so many in need! —*Jackie Horn*

## POP's Treasures Boutique News:

POP's Treasures needs some new/gently used items for the boutique. The store was cleaned out of most items and will need to replenish for the shoppers in the coming months. Please consider the boutique with your treasures!

(No electronics please!)

Committee members:

Valerie Kessler, Jackie Horn

## April Shopping Days:

Friday, April 12: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Saturday, April 13: 9 a.m. to Noon



## Volunteers Needed:

May will soon be here--and that means our commitment to work at the Jacktown show as a fund-raiser will soon be here! May 18-19 are the days of the show. A sign-up sheet is on the narthex for easy sign-up for the event. The sign-up sheet will breakdown the shifts required for the 2 days. Please take the time to help during this fund-raising event. Thank you, any questions, contact Jackie Horn at 610-810-7268

**The NextTrex Challenge Continues:** Prince of Peace is participating in the NextTrex Recycling Challenge. Recycle your household bags and wrap into Trex's Earth-friendly composite decking and railing. (Plastic must be clean, dry and free of food and organic residue.) **From the store:** produce bags, store bags, ice bags. **From the pantry:** Ziploc and other re-closable bags, cereal box liners, case overwrap, bread bags. **From your front door:** newspaper sleeves, dry cleaning bags, bubble wrap, plastic e-commerce mailers. **How does this benefit Prince of Peace?** If we meet our donation goals, we will receive 1 free Trex outdoor bench every six months and we are helping our community. Questions? Contact Jackie Horn



**Dear POP Members,** Thank you for the lovely card shower with all your kind words and well wishes. Your cards on my mantel are a cheering display. I miss seeing you all regularly on Sundays and hope to be able to return once my condition improves. Thanks again for your heartfelt wishes. —*Joan Deichmann*



### April through June Social Ministry Project

First, thank you for your generous response to our first quarter project, Valor House. The project for April through June is Valley Youth House. They believe every young person deserves a place to belong. When youth go to them, they are guaranteed access to all the resources, support, and aid they can provide to help them live well. Each youth receives a "welcome basket" upon arrival containing various items, too many to list here. We would like to partner with Valley Youth House by providing some of the items that go in the basket, here are just a few of the items to donate: toothbrush & toothpaste; floss; razors (male & female); wash cloths; deodorant; bar soap with travel soap holder; ChapStick, body lotion; face wash; shampoo/conditioner; cotton swabs. (You can find a complete list of items on the counter in the Narthex). You may place your items in the basket in the Narthex. Social Ministry thanks you for your continued support of all our projects and ministries. Galatians 6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. — *Mary O'Meally*

#### P.U.M.P Update:

Donations of **canned vegetables, cereal, pasta and mac n' cheese** are greatly needed and much appreciated right now. Thank you for your continued generous donations!

**The POP scholarship committee is pleased to announce that the Anthony D. and Jeanne M. Turtzo scholarship application form is now available for completion.**

All POP college students entering their second, third or fourth year of college/university for the 2024/2025 school year are eligible. The scholarship will be awarded to up to three students. Application forms and instructions can be downloaded from the church website at [popbangor.org](http://popbangor.org), or alternatively send a request by e-mail to [poplcbangor@gmail.com](mailto:poplcbangor@gmail.com). Completed applications are due **Monday, May 6, 2024.**



### MOTHER'S DAY is just around the corner – May 12<sup>th</sup>!

Would you like to remember/honor your Mother and/or Women who are special to you by listing their name in our announcement folder, on the bulletin board and in the June Newsletter? A yellow sign-up sheet is on the counter in the Narthex. Or, use the form below (use additional paper if needed). Suggested donation: \$1 per name benefits the Sunday School. **Deadline is: Sunday, May 5th.** Please PRINT:

**In Memory of:** \_\_\_\_\_

**In Honor of:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Sponsored by:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Amount Enclosed:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Return this form to: Attn: Annette at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, 2445 Lake Minsi Drive, Bangor, PA 18013**

## Excerpts from PastorMail:

### An Invitation:

As you may know, Prince of Peace had a Quilting group that met for many years. At one time, it was a very vibrant ministry! But like all things, its time eventually came to an end. Last year, the remaining members decided to donate all the materials they still had to St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Plainfield Township, where they still have a thriving quilting ministry.



I received an email from the pastor at St. Peter's, inviting anyone here who might like to work with them to do so! That email is printed below:

*I was meeting with our Social Ministry group recently and we were talking about the Quilters group that used to be at Prince of Peace and how they donated material to St Peter's because they no longer have a group that meets. The question came up if there were any former members of the group that would be interested in continuing to do ministry by quilting, sewing, knitting or crocheting items that would be given to local hospitals and nursing homes. We have a network of people inside and outside of St Peter's that does handiwork that we collect for this purpose. We would be willing to provide yarn or other materials to anyone who might be interested in working together with us. Can you please pass this along to whomever might still be around from the Quilters group and any others that might want to help? We would appreciate anyone who was willing.*

If you're interested, please let me know and I'll get you in touch with the right people. —*Pastor Scholtes*



### Opportunity to help a nearby food pantry:

I found out that the Open Cupboard Food Pantry in Clinton, New Jersey was destroyed by fire on February 25. I know it's a little outside our area, but I thought that perhaps some of you might be interested in helping. If you are, please see their website at the link: [www.opencupboardfoodpantry.org/news-events/](http://www.opencupboardfoodpantry.org/news-events/). It gives information about how you can help.

*Psalm 91:1*  
*He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High*  
*Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty*

Date:	Greeters	Lay Reader	Assisting Minister	Ushers	Power Point and Camera	Acolyte	Offering Counters
April 7	Vivian Fahr, Traci Rumsey	Isabel Baker	Laraine Brands	Georgia and John Suranofsky	Kim Jennings	Isabel Baker	Georgia Suranofsky
April 14	Sherk and June Jones	Alex Scholtes	Tina Johns	Traci Rumsey, Connie Itterly	Antonioli Family	Alex Scholtes	Chip Harrison
April 21	Connie Itterly, Sara Godshalk	Mark Grusso	Marlene Stana	Brenda Hughes, Sue Reinhart	John Martocci	Landon Horn	Tina Johns
April 28	Brenda Hughes, Sue Reinhart	Quincy Miller	Connie Itterly	Brooks Baker, Kale Baker	Cathy Mullen	Alex Scholtes	Scott Schipps
May 5	Georgia and John Suranofsky	April Miller	Bob Schuette	Marlene and Butch Stana	Tara Flyte	Isabel Baker	Brenda Hughes

**Communion Assistants:**

- April 7 Connie Itterly, April Miller
- April 14 Laraine Brands, Marlene Stana
- April 21 Tina Johns, Brooks Baker
- April 28 Jim Jennings, Diane Hahn
- May 5 Marlene Stana, Brooks Baker,

**April Altar Guild:** Kim Jennings, Sara Godshalk

**May Altar Guild:** Carolyn Leidy, Terry Stiso

**Bread Baker/Providers:**

- April 7 June Jones
- May 5 Connie Itterly

*Thank you!*

**Weis Grocery Receipts - Thank you to all who save their Weis receipts for Prince of Peace!**

Prince of Peace recently received **\$305.33** in exchange for submitting **\$30,533 worth of Weis grocery receipts**. Keep up the good work -- Save those receipts and earn some \$ for Prince of Peace with very little work. Keep those grocery receipts coming! Please note we can only use slips from the Blue Valley store and we cannot use receipts for gift cards, milk, tobacco, sales tax, alcohol and pharmacy items. These items are deducted from the slips. **Thank you for your continued support.** —Janet Martocci

**Thank you for your willingness to serve!!**

If you are unable to fulfill an assignment, please find someone to take your place and let Pastor Scholtes know of the change as soon as possible. For last minute changes be sure to leave the message on Pastor Scholtes' voice mail at 610-588-2355 or email him at [PastorMJS@gmail.com](mailto:PastorMJS@gmail.com).

 **Would you like to join the team of volunteers who endeavor to enhance our weekly worship time together? Contact Annette Buss or Pastor Scholtes**


**Sunday Coffee Hour in Fellowship Hall**

Come join us and bring someone with you! Coffee hours are hosted each week by two or more people. If you are interested in hosting coffee hours, please sign up on the sheet on the bulletin board in the hallway outside Fellowship Hall. Hosting involves setting up coffee and tea and supplying baked goods/snacks. Members of the Coffee Hour Team are available to help if needed: Karen Karner, Janet Martocci, Cathy Mullen and Sue Reinhart.



**Prince of Peace Seekers (POPS):**



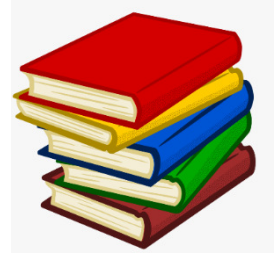
 Come and ignite your spiritual imagination! We meet each week for a time of spiritual growth, discussion, and fellowship. We continue to meet from 10-12 and are now meeting in the Conference Room. Coffee, tea, and snacks are available.

Art and Spirit is the theme for the month of April, with Kim Jennings coordinating the activities for each week. During the first session on April 4, we will create decorated plaques for display in the church which were donated and started by Mary O'Meally. Please join us and stay tuned for the other POPS activities in the Bulletin! If you have any questions, please contact Karen Karner or Janet Martocci.

**JOIN  
US!  
We  
meet  
at  
2 p.m.**

**Real Readers Book List:**

- April 4 – “Beneath a Scarlet Sky” by Mark Sullivan (Terry)
- May 2 – Remarkably Bright Creatures” by Shelby VanPelt (Linda)
- June 6 – “The Covenant of Water” by Abraham Verghese (Karen)
- July 11 – “The Tiffany Girls” by Shelley Noble (Patti)
- August 1 – “What the Fireflies Knew” by Kai Harris (Cindy)
- September 5 – “A fever in the Heartland” by Timothy Egan (Cheryl)
- October 3 – “The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo” by Taylor Jenkins Reid (Maureen)
- November 7 – “The Children’s Blizzard” by Melanie Benjamin (Wanda)
- December 5 – “Mr. Dickens and His Carol” by Samantha Silva (Sherry)



Thank you to everyone who helped assemble layettes, made a monetary donation and/or donated items for the Layette Project this year! We also received \$250 from the Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, Thrivent Action Teams, Live Generously program which was used to purchase layette items and postage to ship our kits to Maryland. This was our 17th year and we had fun assembling 37 layettes for those in need. We have made 612 layettes since starting this project in 2006. Thank you for your support!

—*Michele Harrison, Joanne Schipps and the Social Ministry Committee.*

**Layette Shower**



**THANK YOU!**



**DID YOU KNOW?**

...Gifts may be made to the Endowment Fund at any time!

At the annual meeting we made some decisions about how the sub funds would be used in 2024 for property and other ministries. Continuing to grow the fund through “Milestone Giving” is an opportunity we all can take to make gifts to honor an event that happens in your life of family and friends. Check out this link to see more about gifting. [https://youtu.be/gj\\_FsRJM7y0](https://youtu.be/gj_FsRJM7y0) --*Endowment Trustees*

**On-site (9:45 on Sundays)**

**Online / Facebook / Telephone**

Watch our worship each week at our website ([popbangor.org/video-worship](http://popbangor.org/video-worship)). Or watch it on our Facebook page ([facebook.com/popbangor](https://facebook.com/popbangor)). You can also call in to hear our worship each week at 877-POP-2-POP (877-767-2767). New videos and audio files will be added each Monday.



**BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS**

Mark your calendars! We will hold a Blessing of the Animals service on Saturday, May 18 at 10:00 a.m. in the church grove. More info next month!



# BLESSED

*by the amazing grace of God*



Monday, April 1	Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Genesis 1:1-19; 1 Corinthians 15:35-49
Tuesday, April 2	Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Genesis 1:20-2:4a; 1 Corinthians 15:50-58
Wednesday, April 3	Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Song of Solomon 3:1-11; Mark 16:1-8
Thursday, April 4	Psalm 133; Daniel 1:1-21; Acts 2:42-47
Friday, April 5	Psalm 133; Daniel 2:1-23; Acts 4:23-31
Saturday, April 6	Psalm 133; Daniel 2:24-49; John 12:44-50
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter (4/7)</b>	Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1 – 2:2; John 20:19-31
Monday, April 8	Psalm 135; Daniel 3:1-30; 1 John 2:3-11
Tuesday, April 9	Psalm 135; Daniel 6:1-28; 1 John 2:12-17
Wednesday, April 10	Psalm 135; Isaiah 26:1-15; Mark 12:18-27
Thursday, April 11	Psalm 4; Daniel 9:1-19; 1 John 2:18-25
Friday, April 12	Psalm 4; Daniel 10:2-19; 1 John 2:26-28
Saturday, April 13	Psalm 4; Acts 3:1-10; Luke 22:24-30
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter (4/14)</b>	Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4; 1 John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b-48
Monday, April 15	Psalm 150; Jeremiah 30:1-11a; 1 John 3:10-16
Tuesday, April 16	Psalm 150; Hosea 5:15-6:6; 2 John 1:1-6
Wednesday, April 17	Psalm 150; Proverbs 9:1-6; Mark 16:9-18
Thursday, April 18	Psalm 23; Genesis 30:25-43; Acts 3:17-26
Friday, April 19	Psalm 23; Genesis 46:28-47:6; Acts 4:1-4
Saturday, April 20	Psalm 23; Genesis 48:8-19; Mark 6:30-34
<b>4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter (4/21)</b>	Acts 4:5-12; Psalm 23; 1 John 3:16-24; John 10:11-18
Monday, April 22	Psalm 95; 1 Samuel 16:1-13; 1 Peter 5:1-5
Tuesday, April 23	Psalm 95; 1 Chronicles 11:1-9; Revelation 7:13-17
Wednesday, April 24	Psalm 95; Micah 7:8-20; Mark 14:26-31
Thursday, April 25	Psalm 22:25-31; Amos 8:1-7; Acts 8:1b-8
Friday, April 26	Psalm 22:25-31; Amos 8:11-13; Acts 8:9-25
Saturday, April 27	Psalm 22:25-31; Amos 9:7-15; Mark 4:30-32
<b>5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter (4/28)</b>	Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 22:25-31; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8
Monday, April 29	Psalm 80; Isaiah 5:1-7; Galatians 5:16-26
Tuesday, April 30	Psalm 80; Isaiah 32:9-20; James 3:17-18

*Read these on your computer or on your phone! Go to [DailyLectio.net](http://DailyLectio.net), where you can sign-up for daily emails or download the app for iPhone or Android!*





*Please keep these people in prayer on the anniversary of their birth!*

Justine Saviet, April 1  
Virginia Pensyl, April 1  
Gladys Halfpenny, April 2  
Benjamin Reinhart, April 2  
Sharon Yetter, April 2  
Nelson Hill, April 2  
Tyler Hughes, April 2  
Lois Brozina, April 3  
Lillian Khan, April 3  
Robert Schuette, April 7  
James Dotta, April 7  
Matthew Rumsey, April 7  
Janet Pearson, April 10  
Samantha Gurski, April 13  
Connie Itterly, April 15  
Tyler Flyte, April 15  
James Parsons, April 15  
Wayne Silvius, April 17  
Tyler Reinhart, April 18  
Andrea Gurski, April 18  
Jacob Krock, April 20  
Jameson Hockenbury, April 21  
Phyllis Patterson, April 23  
Colleen Hall, April 24  
Carolyn Carpenter, April 24  
Diane Flynn, April 25  
Betty Devito, April 26  
Mia Hock, April 28  
Scott Manicke, April 28  
Carol Shuman, April 28  
Jacklyn Artley, April 29  
Cameron Mousley, April 29  
Ronald Miller, April 30

# BackPack BUDDIES



Because Hunger Doesn't End on Friday

## Social Ministry Update:

Slater Family Network has reached out to us regarding their "Backpack Buddy Program". They are desperately in need of the following items: juice boxes, jelly and healthy snacks. This will be an ongoing project for us since food insecurity among kids is at an all-time high. In the past this congregation has been very generous in making sure the backpacks are always full. There's a sample of items to donate on the counter in the Narthex, and a basket to place your donations in. Social Ministry thanks you for your continued support of this and all our ministries and projects. "For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat. Matthew 25:35" —*Mary O'Meally*



## MARCH COUNCIL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

1. Watch for information about events for the 50th Anniversary of ELCA World Hunger
2. Welcome to our new volunteer coordinator Mark Grusso

## RECENT PASTORAL ACTS

First Communion: Peyton Walters, Dominic Walters,  
March 10  
Fabian Vargas, March 24





**Prince of Peace Lutheran Church**  
2445 Lake Minsi Drive (Johnsonville)  
Bangor, Pennsylvania 18013  
Office Phone: 610-588-2355

**Website: [www.popburangor.org](http://www.popburangor.org)**  
**Online Coordinator: Heather Scholtes**  
**[lotsofsocks@live.com](mailto:lotsofsocks@live.com)**

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**Worship and Holy Communion Schedule:**  
**Sundays at 9:45 a.m. – Join us!!**  
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- **Pastor: Rev. Michael J. Scholtes**
- **home: 610-588-2314 - [PastorMJS@gmail.com](mailto:PastorMJS@gmail.com)**
- **Volunteer Pastoral Assist. Larry Rissmiller**  
**610-588-4669**
- **Minister of Music: Martin Yazdzik**
- **Bookkeeper: Joyce Weishaupt**
- **Financial Secretary: Mary O’Meally**
- **Custodian: Brittnee Evans**
- **Parish Nurse: Justine Saviet, 610-730-7895,**  
**[cesarijustine1080@gmail.com](mailto:cesarijustine1080@gmail.com)**
- **Administrative Assistant: Annette Buss**
- **Admin. Asst’s Office Hours: Monday, Tuesday,**  
**Wednesday, Friday 9am–Noon**  
**Thursday: 1 to 4 pm**
- Admin. Asst’s email: [poplcbangor@gmail.com](mailto:poplcbangor@gmail.com)**

**Congregation Council Members:**

- |                                 |                 |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Larry Rissmiller – President    | Brenda Hughes   |
| Connie Itterly - Vice President | Jackie Horn     |
| Tina Johns - Secretary          | Traci Rumsey    |
| Kale Baker                      | Kerri Miller    |
| Sara Godshalk                   | Jean Janosa     |
| Mary O’Meally                   | Jill Hill       |
| Rev. Michael Scholtes           | Allison Manicke |

Would you like to place an article in the monthly newsletter? Highlight your ministry? Post a Thank you? Make an announcement?

**EARLY SUBMISSIONS ARE APPRECIATED!**

May 2024 Newsletter is:

**Tuesday, April 9 at Noon**

**\*\*Please submit items in a Word Document not PDF format, thank you!\*\***

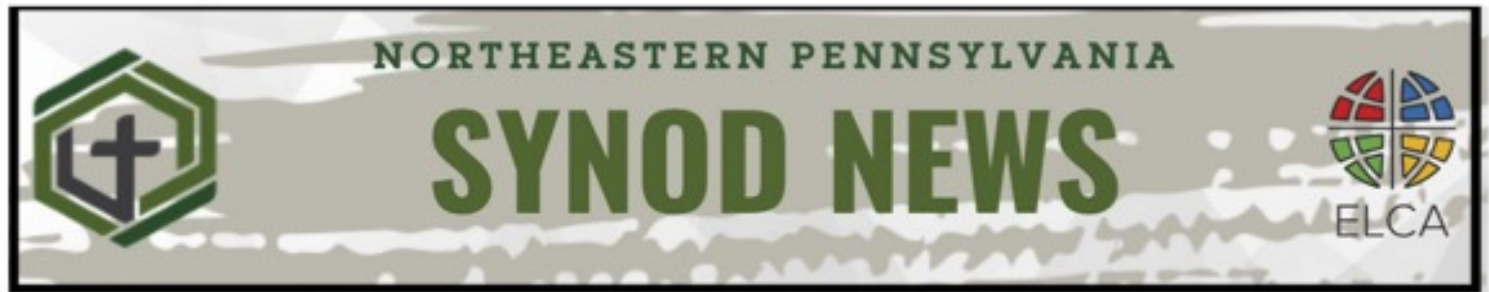
*You may email your submissions to [poplcbangor@gmail.com](mailto:poplcbangor@gmail.com)*

*Or give a handwritten items to **Annette Buss***

**\*\*Items received after the deadline will go into next month’s newsletter.\*\***

**OUR PURPOSE STATEMENT**

***We, the people of Prince of Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church, will actively seek and serve Christ in all people.***



## **Just Being There: Our Alaska Experience as Sitka Lutheran Church Volunteers**

By: Gail Colahan

Sitka is located on the west coast of Baranof Island in the Alaska panhandle. Most of the island lies within the limits of the Tongass National Forest, a temperate rainforest, rich with wildlife and scenic vistas. Inhabited by Tlingit for over 10,000 years, ruled by Russia starting in 1799, then transferred from Russia to the US in 1867, this island community of 8,400 people continues to reflect characteristics of these varied cultures. For over 30 years the abundance of nature, scenery and cultural heritage has attracted cruise ships to Sitka. For most of that time Sitka Lutheran Church (SLC) has supported a summer volunteer program to assist the church in being a welcoming presence amidst a burgeoning tourist presence, which numbered nearly 600,000 in 2023 when we participated as volunteers.

Flash back to June 2019 when we first visited Sitka, not as cruise passengers but as plane travelers on a self-guided tour throughout Southeast Alaska. It just so happened we were in Sitka on Sunday morning so we decided to go to worship after finding an ELCA church within walking distance of our hotel. Entering the church, we read from hallway signage that in 1840 while Sitka was a Russian colony, Finns founded SLC making it the oldest Protestant congregation on the US West Coast. Included with other historical signage hung a poster declaring "Volunteers Wanted". The sign combined with our fascination with the church's origins, its geographic location, and the history and culture of this place prompted us to make further inquiries. We learned about SLC's program inviting volunteers to come to Sitka for a month to welcome summer cruise ship visitors to SLC, with the SLC faith family providing housing and the use of a car during the volunteers' stay. Our intrigue with the idea of such an opportunity prompted us to complete an interest form despite knowing we weren't in a position at the time to make such a commitment.

Four years later we found ourselves in Sitka. Driving into town to open the church, we marveled at vistas of Sitka Sound and surrounding forest-covered land while passing marinas filled with fishing vessels. On days when large cruise ships were in port, Greg greeted visitors outside SLC's front door, enticing them with the smell of freshly popped popcorn and the query, "Did you know that Sitka Lutheran is the oldest Protestant congregation on the west coast?". Gail provided a brief overview of the church's history and pointed out historical objects from the original 1843 church for the curious who ventured inside, and at times drifted into conversations about faith and the church. All visitors received a warm welcome whether they choose to hear the church's history, find solitude in the sanctuary, take a much-needed rest break, or buy some popcorn.

While Greg often felt frustrated when people just walked by with their heads down (probably in part due to the modern façade of SLC's 3rd church building as compared to the original features of the nearby Russian Orthodox Cathedral), he did experience some gratifying encounters - a conversation with a gentleman from China who was interested in talking about the history of Sitka and well-wishers who knew about SLC's volunteer program and just wanted to say hi. On the day we transitioned with the previous volunteers, Greg stood alongside Kurt out in front of the church. A family walking by stopped and

requested a prayer for their child who had a health affliction. Kurt, an ordained pastor, knelt down close to the child in the stroller and proceeded to offer a prayer. Afterwards, the family departed in peace and Greg and Kurt shared their thankfulness in being able to honor the family's request.

On another day with few visitors in town, two seasonal shuttle bus drivers walked into the church. After Gail guided them to the sanctuary to share the church's story, the gentleman asked for time to pray. Sensing the gravity of his request, Gail invited him to stay as long as necessary and indicated she would request visitors quietly respect his being there until he was ready to leave. It was at least a half hour before he and his friend emerged from the sanctuary and shared that his sister was dying and he couldn't be with her and that his time spent in prayer in the church had been the best way for him to face the crisis. Thanks be to God.

In addition to our encounters with visitors, the people of Sitka Lutheran Church blessed us with the warmest of welcomes. Pastor Rudd shared personal and church background and introduced us to Alaska Synod's Bishop Shelly during a SLC hosted Southeast Cluster Meeting. Heather, the secretary who grew up in Sitka, assisted with everything from the latest cruise schedule updates to lending intriguing details and answers to questions about Sitka's more recent history. Sue provided a tour around town to familiarize us with the schools, hospitals, and businesses that are part of the daily life of this area and took us to a refuge for orphaned bear cubs. Paula, another parishioner, gifted us with sweet treats and invited us to her house for a grilled salmon dinner. Wayne guided us through the Alaska wilderness on a glorious hike past cascades and waterfalls to Bear Lake. Harvey and Kathleen, managers of the SLC volunteer program, provided not only a place to stay but enjoyable storytelling over meals and desserts. Even the neighbors extended their welcome with soup and muffins. We were truly humbled by the kindness, generosity, hospitality, and support we received.

Just being there was such a wonderful experience on so many levels – experiencing what it's like to be strangers welcomed into a community, serving as volunteers at SLC, living for 5 weeks on an island in a different environment, exploring the beauty and wonder of the Tongass rainforest and its wildlife, learning about the history and cultures that influenced and characterize Sitka, meeting and talking with people from around the world, and getting to know and become friends with the SLC faith family. We will never know the impact of our being there for most tourists who visited the church. However, SLC parishioners were abundantly grateful and thanked us profusely for assisting in their being a welcoming presence. We also know that the experience had a profound impact on us. Just being there we experienced so many wonderful God moments and blessings – lives touched, joy witnessed, beauty revealed, friendships made. We are so much richer for having had the opportunity to live in a different place and serve as volunteers for Sitka Lutheran Church.



Keynote Speaker: Marie Anne serves as the Senior Director for Building Resilient Communities (BRC) at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Ms. Sliwinski has 20 years of experience working in the non-profit sector, 14 of which are dedicated in international humanitarian and development programs. Ms. Sliwinski oversees BRC, which draws together the ministries of ELCA World Hunger, Lutheran Disaster Response, AMMPARO and the ELCA's Social Ministry Organization to share knowledge, collaborate effectively, invest in new ideas and foster new opportunities for the ELCA, partners, companions and neighbors to strive together "for justice and peace in all the earth." Marie Anne holds a master's degree in international relations from the University of Chicago, and currently resides in the Chicago suburb with her husband and two children. **Register today at [nepasynod.org/assembly2024/](https://nepasynod.org/assembly2024/)**